Many substances can impair driving ability. Fleet safety managers should be aware of best practices to prevent impaired driving, as well as ensure that employees practice defensive techniques to protect against others on the road who may be impaired.

**PS: How has marijuana legalization and the rise of opioid abuse impacted impaired driving among fleet drivers?**

**Phil:** One significant statistic that is not reported in the news is that since the recreational use of marijuana was legalized in Washington, the state’s fatality rate as a result of impairment has doubled. The statistics are fairly startling. Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of drivers involved in fatal crashes who had marijuana in their bloodstream jumped from 8% to 17%, nearly doubling over the course of 1 year. The statistics are astounding as far as opioids go. In 1991, there were 76 million prescriptions in the U.S., and in 2011 there were 219 million prescriptions. That’s a pretty significant increase. There has also been quite an increase in opioid overdose fatalities in the U.S., which was around 5,750 in 2001. In 2014, there were nearly 20,000 opioid overdose fatalities. The statistic I have found to be most alarming is that 75% of interviewed heroin addicts said they started out with prescribed opioids.

There is a crossover of marijuana and alcohol among many impaired drivers. Many people who smoke marijuana do so when drinking. The indications of an impaired driver from alcohol are similar to those from marijuana as far as ability to stay in the lane, impacted vision, motor coordination and ability to perform complex tasks such as driving. The combination of alcohol and marijuana becomes lethal when getting behind the wheel.

Police must be trained on how to properly assess a person’s impairment on the street based on their observations and field tests, rather than based on blood tests. The same goes for safety managers. Blood tests only determine whether the person has recently used marijuana; they do not indicate whether the worker was impaired while on the job.

**PS: What kind of best practices can fleet and safety managers take to prevent impaired driving?**

**Phil:** They should not get too complicated with this. There are too many variables. Managers should have a statement that states that workers will not drive while impaired, for any reason, whether it be alcohol, a prescribed medication or even over-the-counter medications.

Employers must state in their fleet policies that driving while impaired for any reason is unacceptable, and that employees will lose their job if they do so. Keep it simple. Fleet managers, corporations and organizations that have workers who drive for them do not have to have a specific policy for every type of substance. Impairment is impairment. Alcohol, crack, marijuana, heroin and prescribed oxycodone are in the same bucket as far as impairment goes. Therefore, when it comes to impairment, fleet managers must have a good, general and broad statement that clarifies that the driver will not drive while impaired, period.

**PS: What types of medications are not safe to drive after taking?**

**Phil:** Any type of medication that is going to impair you. The big ones that are in the news are the oxys: oxycodone and Oxycotin.

**PS: What medications might people not realize impair their driving ability?**

**Phil:** Over-the-counter cold medication may make a person drowsy, so people should not get behind the wheel after taking it.

**PS: What defensive driving techniques can people use to protect themselves against impaired drivers? How can they best identify vehicles being operated by these drivers?**

**Phil:** If you observe a driver weaving within the lane, which does not have to be all over the lanes of travel, just hitting the right and center lines, then you are witnessing the classic signs of a drunk driver, somebody who does not have an ability to focus. Another sign is a car that is riding the line and going under the speed limit. That is typically an impaired driver who is using the line as a guide figuring that the police will not stop a driver who is driving slowly. But actually, these signs are probable cause to pull the driver over.

If somebody is tailgating you at night, s/he might be an impaired driver using your taillights as a guide. If this happens, take the next right turn.

**“Organizations that have workers who drive for them do not have to have a specific policy for every type of substance. Impairment is impairment. Fleet managers must have a good, general and broad statement that clarifies that the driver will not drive while impaired, period.”**

*Phil Moser*
and continue driving. The driver will typically go straight because s/he cannot react in time.

Drivers usually flick their lights at approaching cars that have high beams on. Failure to dim the car’s lights in response is another classic sign of impairment. Another sign of impairment is if the driver is slumped over at the wheel while at a red light.

Always keep cars with drivers you believe to be impaired in front of your vehicle. Do not try to pass them. Many drivers think that it is safe practice to pass someone who they believe to be impaired because they are getting away from that driver. Do not do that. If you do so, you will have an impaired driver behind you, approaching your car when you are at the next red light. If the impaired driver is in front of you, however, then s/he is not able to crash into you.

People often ask me if they should call the police when they suspect a driver is intoxicated. When this happens, find a safe place to pull over your vehicle over, give a description of the vehicle and stay away from that driver. An impaired driver is unpredictable and dangerous.

The worst time of year for impaired driving begins over Labor Day weekend and goes through December. This is likely because of the college and professional football seasons followed by the holiday season. States that have legalized recreational use of marijuana have essentially thrown gas onto the party fire. Therefore, drivers must be particularly cautious during the autumn season and even more so when driving in these states.

**PS:** How can a company prevent drivers who conceal past drunk driving charges from slipping through the cracks and into their fleet?

**Phil:** Companies must have strict policies regarding the self-reporting of any violations that will affect a person’s driver’s license. For drunk driving, companies should give the worker 24 hours in which to report the incident. If the worker fails to report the incident, which the company will eventually find out about anyway, then the company must take whatever steps necessary to protect itself.

Many different suspensions can occur with a drunk driving arrest. Therefore, it is important that self-reporting be a big part of the company’s policy. If the company finds out that somebody failed to report an incident, then I think the company needs to let that person go because s/he is a liability.